

Claims

1. A methods for a user to interact with a server comprising:

receiving client software for operating on a user-based hardware device that has the ability to control a display, the client software including base software for causing information to be displayed on the display and including software responsive to multiple message types relating to different types of interactivity, program content particular to a certain type of event, and episode content particular to an episode of the event, the receiving of program content and episode content occurring by downloading before the beginning of an episode;

the client receiving from the server messages, each with one of a plurality of message types indicating one of a plurality of types of interactivity related to the episode of the event; and

the base software using the message type to cause to be displayed on the display content associated with that message type and in a form particular to the message type.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising, for a next episode, downloading the episode content without again downloading the program content and without downloading the base software.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising, for an episode of a different program, downloading the program content and the episode content without downloading the base software.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the program content relates to a television program, and the episode content is for a particular episode of that television program.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein at least two of the types of interactivity include a question to which the user can respond.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the types of interactivity include a trivia question and a poll.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the message type indicates a trivia questions, and message includes text for the question, the base software being responsive to the message type for formatting the question as a trivia question and displaying the trivia question.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the formatting further includes displaying a point count for the question that changes with time.

9. The method of claim 7, wherein the base software, responsive to a user entering an answer, causes the answer to be provided to the server to determine if it is correct.

10. The method of claim 7, wherein the base software, responsive to a user entering an answer, checks the answer against an answer stored as episode content.

11. The method of claim 7, wherein one of the client and server corrects the answer, the client receiving from the server and displaying a point total for multiple users interacting at the same time with the server.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the client is presentation layer independent.

13. The method of claim 1, wherein the client operates with a particular type of presentation software.

14. The method of claim 1, further comprising sending messages to and receiving messages from other users via the server.

15. The method of claim 1, wherein the episode content includes an advertisement, the base software being responsive to a message type for causing the advertisement to be displayed.

16. The methods of claim 1, wherein the client is responsive to the receipt of a message type and audio and/or video information for synchronizing the audio and/or video information to the interactivity indicated by the message type.

17. A method for a server to interact with a user comprising:
providing client software to a user-based hardware device having the ability to control a display, the client software including:

base software for causing information to be displayed on the display,
program content particular to a certain type of event, and
episode content particular to a specific episode of the event;

the program content and episode content being downloaded before the beginning of an episode;

the server providing to the client messages, each with one of a plurality of message types indicating one of a plurality of types of interactivity related to the episode of the event so that the user can cause to be displayed on the display content associated with that message type.

18. The method of claim 17, further comprising, for a next episode, providing the episode content without again providing the program content and the base software.

19. The method of claim 17, further comprising, for an episode of a different program, providing the program content and the episode content without again providing the base software.

20. The method of claim 17, wherein the program content relates to a television program, and the episode content is for a particular episode of that television program.

21. The method of claim 17, wherein one of the types of interactivity include a question to which the user can respond, the message including a message type and a question.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein the types of interactivity include a trivia question and a poll.

23. The method of claim 21, wherein the server is responsive to the base software providing either an answer for correction or an indication that the answer was correct for providing to users point totals indicating points in response to the answers provided.

24. The method of claim 17, wherein the client is provided to be presentation layer independent.

25. The method of claim 17, wherein the client is provided and adapted to operate on a particular type of presentation software.

26. The method of claim 17, further comprising a technical director for managing the server and providing messages to and receiving messages from the server.

27. The method of claim 26, wherein the server provides messages from users to the technical director, wherein the technical director is staffed by an individual that can provide responses to users via the server.

28. The method of claim 26, wherein questions for responses are initiated from the technical director to the server, and thereafter to the users.

29. The method of claim 26, wherein the program is a television program, wherein the technical director provides content to the server for transmission to the users, the content being stored and timed to be received by the user in such a way that the content is synchronized to the television program to display content relevant to the program at that time.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein the content is stored in advance of being displayed and is timed to appear at selected times.

31. The method of claim 30, wherein the technical director receives content as a human input and provides that content on the fly as a supplement to the content stored in advance.

32. The method of claim 29, wherein the technical director receives content as a human input and provides that content on the fly to appear at a desired time such that it is relevant to the program at that time.

33. The method of claim 17, wherein the episode content includes an advertisement, the server sending a message type to indicate to the client that the client should cause the advertisement to be displayed.

34. The methods of claim 17, wherein the server provides audio and/or video information synchronized to textual messages to cause the textual messages to be displayed with the audio and/or video content.

35. The method of claim 17, where messages can be provided to thousands of users at the same time.

36. A system for interacting with users comprising:

a server having interface for connection to the Internet infrastructure to provide messages to users that have client software for receiving messages from the server;

a technical director for providing to the server different message types that indicate one of a number of types of interactivity with users, and for providing message content to the server, the message content relating to a specific episode of an interactive event, wherein the technical director can provide stored messages and message types for display at desired times during the event, and individually input information on the fly;

the server, responsive to messages and message types from the technical director, for providing such message types and message content to users.

37. The system of claim 36, wherein, in some instances, the technical director provides only a message type, and the server provides related content.

38. The system of claim 36, wherein, in some instances, the technical director provides only a message type, and the server provides the message type to the user, the message type indicating to the user that content previously stored by the user is to be displayed.

39. The system of claim 36, wherein, in some instances, the technical director provides a message type and the content to be provided.

40. The system of claim 36, wherein the server provides questions with a message type and maintains scores of users who answer questions, the server periodically providing a list of scores to the users.

41. The system of claim 36, wherein the technical director, responsive to individual input, responds to messages input by users and provided to the technical director via the server.

42. The method of claim 1, wherein the base software is downloaded through Internet infrastructure.

43. The method of claim 1, wherein the base software resides on the hardware device without being downloaded through Internet infrastructure.

44. The method of claim 17, wherein the base software is downloaded through Internet infrastructure.

45. The method of claim 17, wherein the base software resides on the hardware device without being downloaded through Internet infrastructure.